

## Vizag

It is the dignity that strikes one first.

A housewife in Vizag lives in a shanty. Her family staked out the space, and the neighbours understood. They did not object. Hindus do not. It is part of the process of life. Eventually, government will let the family declare this their legal house. They have the dignity of a home, made a mark, and it is there for all to see. They can walk straighter, yet they will not. It is not the way.

The lady of the house complains to a researcher of unfair treatment. A new product was recently introduced, and free samples were given away. Yet the housewife did not benefit. Why? After all, she is lower class, with little money. Why should the manufacturer bother?

Because the housewife has dignity. Of course, a free sample helps her budget. But she sighs "Don't we eat? Don't we wash clothes? If your product is good value, and good quality, wouldn't we buy it? It will help us".

The same housewife is getting her children ready for school. The laundry is soaking in an aluminium bucket, and the children are drawing, sitting on their parent's bed. As she holds her daughter's hand, walking to the door of their house, she brushes a fly from her shoulder. Neither sees that the child's blouse is universal .. white, clean and a symbol of daily victory.

In Calcutta, a pharmacist debates with a doctor, who practices next door. What is to become of Indian Pharmacy? Why can't Industry use imagination? Education gets misused to improve bureaucracy. But don't improve people's lives. Where is the sense in that? Will the pharmacist win the debate?

British Airways flight nineteen is leaving Bombay, on a crisp and misty January morning. People seeking a new future sit in the plane, with scarcely contained excitement. The Englishman is relieved to go home. Up front, an Indian businessman is bored. How many times does he need to understand the use of an oxygen mask? How many times does he need to sit with young kids from the West? Where is the dignity?

The Vizag schoolgirl is in her seat, not understanding her cloudy future. There is so much to learn. How do you change the inevitable? Neither the girl nor the housewife discusses the concept, yet they practice survival.

Flight one eighteen from Hyderabad is delayed four hours. No one cares. Is there dignity in that? Did you ask anyone? What did they say? But then, is this any different elsewhere? British Airways, the darling of the Indian businessman, used to be the model. Let the schoolgirl run the airline: she will try, and she will succeed. Let the businessman run the shanty, and he will fail. The girl will build the airline. The businessman will demolish the shanty.

Where is the dignity in that?

So, where do I fit? I bring a camera and observe. I see the f-stop, and the focus range. I compose the subject, and I think how I can frame the print. Why didn't I bring a wider lens?

The housewife's son has just had his seventh birthday, and he sees the camera. He wants to look, so he does. He can see his brother but can't see the thinness of his body. His mother tells him

"Stop, go back to your drawing. Leave the foreigner alone". But the boy persists, just as the stranger's boy, miles away, plays with his brother's Nintendo. Boys will be boys.

The foreigner sees the morning sunbeam but misses the light in the eyes. Something is there to learn, but no words appear. Instead, he lets the boy take a photograph. When next will a computer analyze the shanty?

They don't like to queue in this country says the man. He owns the first self-service supermarket in Andhra. So, he forgoes a row of checkouts, and encourages democracy at the exit. Yet, he trusts his customers to choose their own products, as they put items into orange plastic. In Singapore, his brother locks simple toiletries behind glass, as pilferage is rife. What would the Lion City do in Vizag ... fine people for not queuing? Where is the dignity in that?

A salesman pulls up his three-wheeler outside the fancy goods store. For some reason, his product display is at the back of the store, on the top shelf. Never mind that it is the biggest display in a poor town,

"Sorry sir, I'll move it". Who has dignity ... the salesman, or the storekeeper? What did the Guru say?

Dignity preserves the past.

"No sir, we do not dislike the British. All you did wrong was leave. No sir, we do not dislike Muslims. All they did wrong was narrow their God".

The Raj exhibition goes on every day.

"You invented bureaucracy, we perfected it".

The hotel was a Palace, yet the Gin is Indian.

"Let us show you how to serve".

Unexpectedly, the businessman visits his plant in Bhopal. He understands the pride in his people.

"Sir, we have got the most educated workforce in town. Sir, we have opened a creche for our people. Sir, we can improve our productivity, at little cost".

Dignity? Whose?

The housewife says "Sir, do not change the quality of our product ... it is good, and it is value".

The politician says "I am a fundamentalist (let me tell you what that means, as no one has done in two thousand years). You can maim children, now. And I deserve your vote. I am a socialist (and it is better to spin your own cloth). You do not need foreign ideas (except for

bombs). And I deserve your vote. I am important (so I will meet visitors at the airport on your behalf). And I deserve your vote. I am educated (you are not). And I deserve your vote”.

Chola bronzes are on display at the V&A to show that the British really do care: not enough to give the bronzes back, but enough to rename them. Rodin is in the cupboard. A tourist buys a sandalwood Ganesh, for a terrible price (he knows that, but he thinks he understands Ganesh in a way that the saleswoman does not).

Art has no dignity.